

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Richard Tomiyasu

Richard Tomiyasu, the youngest of three sons, was born to Katsutaro and Kikuyo Tomiyasu in Honolulu, O'ahu, Hawai'i in 1932.

His father was an immigrant from Hiroshima-*ken*, Japan; his mother was a nisei, born on the island of Maui.

Katsutaro Tomiyasu was a trunk salesman, skilled in woodwork and carpentry.

Days or possibly weeks following the outbreak of war, Kikuyo Tomiyasu was questioned by FBI agents and removed from her home for possession of a shortwave radio. Held at Fort Armstrong near the U.S. Immigration Station for about a year, she occasionally spoke with her husband who was allowed to visit.

In the early months of 1943, Katsutaro Tomiyasu informed his family to prepare for a move to the U.S. Mainland. Their home was sold and belongings packed.

The Tomiyasus, including Kikuyo, her husband, her three sons, and her granddaughter (by a previous marriage), were transported first to the West Coast, then to Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas. They were held there for one and a half years.

Later, the family was moved to Gila River War Relocation Center in Arizona where they remained for another year and a half.

Returned to the islands in December 1945, the Tomiyasus found themselves homeless. They were sheltered at the Fort Street Young Buddhists Association building for a few months.

Employed as a maintenance man, Katsutaro Tomiyasu supported his family. They lived in a home not too far from their prewar residence.

Richard Tomiyasu, a 1950 graduate of McKinley High School, is a retired State of Hawai'i Department of Education employee. He has two daughters and three grandchildren.

Tape No. 57-18-1-12

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Tomiyasu (RT)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

October 11, 2012

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: Okay, today is October 11, 2012, and we're interviewing Richard Tomiyasu. We're doing this for the Unspoken Memories Jerome Internment Camp oral history project. Interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto. Also present is Richard Tomiyasu's daughter (BT).

RT: Beverly.

WN: Bev Taira. And we're going to start now. So the first question we have for you, Richard, is when and where you were born.

RT: I was born in Honolulu, 1932. As far as I know, my dad said we were living on Fort Street. We had six homes, small cottages, and was rented out. He had to sell the place because Grandma [RT's mother, Kikuyo Tomiyasu] was very vocal with the tenants. So he said he doesn't want any fight with the tenants and so he sold the place. Then we moved to McCully, 1919 Fern Street. This is where I went to school, Lunalilo Elementary School.

WN: You know that Fort Street property, around where was that?

RT: If I recall, across from Soto Mission [of Hawai'i]. What was the street? Kauila or something like that, the street. Small cottages. So we can never get ahead, you know, with Grandma. Right? You know Grandma.

WN: (Laughs) We'll talk about Grandma. Well, tell me about Grandma. Your mother's name was Kikuyo?

RT: Yeah, Kikuyo. According to what I knew, she was born in Hāmākua Poko, Maui as daughter of a *bon-san*. I don't know what sect it was. I don't know how my father met her, but here we are. (Chuckles) I don't know how old she was, too. As far as I knew, Grandma was—my mother was older than my father. About one or two years or something like that.

WN: Do you know if she had brothers or sisters?

RT: Yeah. She had a sister, Mrs. Sasaki. When we first knew about her, she lived at Pearl City Peninsula. She had a huge lot. We used to like to go there because she had mango trees and we used to love to eat the mangoes. Plus that, during World War II, before that, she used to have a lunch wagon and she used to sell sodas, hot dogs, and whatever it is.

WN: You're talking about [Mrs.] Sasaki, who was your mother's sister?

RT: Yeah. My mother's brother is Fujitani. My mother's maiden name was Fujitani and he was the mechanic for Love's Bakery in Kapahulu. He lived by Second Street in Pearl

- City in the Peninsula area. He had two daughters and one son. That was Howard. Grace was his second one and. . . .
- BT: Michiko.
- RT: Michiko was the oldest. But Howard was an engineer and he was employed with the federal government. Michiko graduated from UH [University of Hawai'i] as a teacher. Grace, she went forward to the Mainland and she became. . . . I don't know, some kind of designer or something with dresses or what. But anyway, she came back and she met. . . .
- BT: Morisada.
- RT: George Morisada. George is a chemist. Eventually, made up ABC Soap Factory in Waipahu. Now they live way up there [in 'Aiea], Royal Summit.
- WN: So, all three of the siblings—your mom, and the brother, and sister—all moved from Maui to O'ahu . . .
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: . . . somewhere. And when they moved, your grandparents were still on Maui?
- RT: No, my grandma was with the Fujitanis. Uncle married this lady and she eventually made a barbershop. Every time we visited her, we used to get free haircut and soda water.
- WN: This was where?
- RT: In Pearl City.
- WN: Oh, Pearl City.
- MK: And that's your Fujitani uncle, yeah?
- RT: Yeah, Fujitani. Right between the Pearl City theater and the Japanese church on Second Avenue. The church is still there.
- MK: Yeah.
- WN: Yeah, the [Pearl City] Hongwanji, yeah?
- RT: I don't know what's the. . . .
- WN: Kinda near Pearl City Tavern, too, huh?
- RT: Well, you got to pass the Pearl City—the Pearl City Tavern was on the corner, yeah?
- MK: Mm-hmm [yes].
- WN: I think that was Lehua Avenue.
- MK: So your mother, she was a nisei, yeah? Second generation.
- RT: Yeah. She also had another brother. We used to call him Teru-*chan*. Teruo. He moved to LA, Los Angeles. When we were incarcerated in Arizona in Gila, my mother and my brother George and Kazu, they visited Teru-*chan*. You know, Teru. I'm the only one that never left the camps.
- BT: Who was Teru?

- RT: Grandma's brother. She's always thought of him because she's never seen him for a long period of time, but then they exchanged letters. I don't know where he's buried now. Could be someplace in California.
- WN: You also said your mother had a daughter by a previous marriage?
- RT: Yeah. Her name is Florence Hiroko Yamamoto. But eventually she got married to this *haole* guy, James Parker. They moved to the LA side. My brother-in-law, that James, he passed away already. You knew that one? Jimmy. He passed away and my sister right now, according to my nephew, my oldest brother's son, she's in a care home. She must be about ninety, ninety-one.
- BT: Ninety-two. She's twelve years older than you.
- WN: So Florence also went to the camps with you, right?
- BT: No.
- WN: No?
- BT: The daughter did.
- WN: Oh, oh, oh. Florence's. . . .
- MK: The daughter of Florence.
- WN: Okay. Anyway. Tell us about your father.
- RT: My father [Katsutaro Tomiyasu], as far as I knew, was born and raised in Japan, Onomichi, Hiroshima. He was once upon a time a sailor on a ship that came to Hawai'i. I guess he enjoyed Hawai'i as an opportunity for him to get ahead and away from the family, too. So after getting discharged, he came to Hawai'i and, as far as I knew, he was a salesman for a trunk—*toranku* kind—trunk salesman. But eventually, he knew the intricacies of how to build that trunk. So when we sort of had to leave Hawai'i for camp, he made his own *toranku* and everything, trunk.
- WN: So he was pretty skilled in carpentry?
- RT: Well, he was more the salesman, but he learned fast. He can look at something, he would just imagine he could do it. Just like when we was living at Hālawa. A carpenter tell me, "Richard, don't look too good because the next time you not going to call us for repair. You're going to do it yourself." True enough, he was right. But anyway, my father was eventually. . . . When we were transferred to the Mainland, he was a carpenter.
- WN: Okay, we'll get into that. But your father was *issei*, right? He was born in Hiroshima. Your mother was *nisei*, born in Hāmākua Poko, Maui. How was your mother's English?
- RT: She's fifty-fifty. She's more fluent in Japanese than in the English. Because whenever she scolded us, always rattled off in Japanese. That's how we learn how to talk Japanese. Our father was more trying to learn to speak Japanese, but . . .
- WN: You mean, English? Your father spoke Japanese.
- RT: Yeah, but the people he spoke to cannot understand it, so he got broken English, right? Right?
- BT: Yeah.
- RT: But he was all right.

- MK: Would you know how much education your mom had on Maui? Like to what grade, you think?
- RT: I have no idea, but I assume something like between sixth and eighth grade. As far as I'm concerned, my parents was not wholesome about education. But that's their prerogative. What they believe in and what they learn, everything. I don't believe that.
- MK: You mentioned that your mother was the daughter of a *bon-san*. Would you know where your mother's father's temple was?
- RT: Hāmākua Poko.
- MK: Hāmākua Poko, okay.
- RT: I haven't been there so I don't know where it is. She's never given us any address or anything, see. All we knew was that Grandma [RT's mother] always used to talk about she was the daughter of the *bon-san*, and she always talk about church, church, church. (RT sighs.)
- (Laughter)
- WN: How was that with you? You're growing up in McCully and your mother's father was a *bon-san*. She was telling you guys about church. How was that growing up in that kind of household?
- RT: I didn't like it.
- WN: Why?
- RT: Because everything we did was not good for them. They were not pleased. But growing up, when I was in high school, the gang that I mingled with, they were more with sports and Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Mormons. So I wanted to play as a youngster, right, high school. So I say, okay. In the night I would go out and Tuesday night they have the sporting events and Sunday you have to go church to qualify to play on Tuesday. Our church was at Artesian and King Street. We were the Artesian Stake. Eventually, they closed that down and they moved to Beretania—Kalākaua and Beretania, Warren. But then we were going over there. Of course, naturally, I wanted to play and everything, you know, sports wasn't year-round, right? They have social gathering. So eventually I learned how to dance and everything. Next thing I knew, I was the best of the group. So she said, well, I want you to practice on the tango. Tango was easy. Fox trot and like that. We practiced every Tuesday. But when it came to the very end, the day of reckoning, the show, I couldn't make it because I had to go work. You know what I'm saying? It was a Saturday night and Saturday we worked all day until late in the night. Came Sunday morning, I went to church, the lady never spoke to me or talked to me or anything. When that's the case, I gave them my reason. I don't come from a rich family. We got to work. And I say, "Well, forget it. I'm not going to come back to this church." I even bought the *Book of Mormon* and they have that kind of attitude. I said, "That's not for me."
- WN: So this is like high school.
- RT: Yeah. Intermediate, high school.
- WN: After the war, then. I was just wondering when you were a young boy, before the war, growing up McCully. Mother was a daughter of a *bon-san*. What was that like for you being—was that a Buddhist household, would you say?
- RT: We take a bath early. We ate early. We went to bed early before seven o'clock. It was very strict, in a way. That was it.
- WN: Did you have to go church on Sunday, Buddhist church?

- RT: Very seldomly we went to Sheridan Street. That church [Shingon Mission] on Sheridan, next to Sheridan Building Supply?
- WN: Yeah, yeah, right. It's still there. What about your father? Was he Buddhist?
- RT: Well, if he need to go church, he would go church. If you didn't have to go, he would rest or find jobs to do on the weekends, Saturday and Sunday, like that. He wasn't . . .
- WN: Did you have a *butsudan* in your house?
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: So you had the altar and . . .
- RT: But that was for Shi-*chan*, yeah? My mother's daughter by a previous marriage. It never dawned on me for. . . . In other words, I didn't care to go church. All *da kine* talk. She's buried at that Mō'ili'ili. . . . What is that?
- WN: The big cemetery over there?
- BT: The Mō'ili'ili one. The one that they're building the wall?
- RT: Next to Kapi'olani Boulevard.
- MK: Mō'ili'ili Cemetery, yeah?
- WN: Amid all the high-rises, yeah?
- MK: You know your home in McCully, what was the neighborhood like in McCully? Who lived around there?
- RT: Oh, we used to have Chinese people, and Japanese people, Hawaiians, Okinawans. I knew practically everybody because during elementary school, go play. It was all right.
- MK: It was a mixed neighborhood then.
- RT: I'm trying to remember what the name of that Hawaiian folks. But anyway, they were nice. The block from Pumehana to McCully Street, there was a small lane in between. So we used to cut across from Fern, Date, Citron [Streets], and we used to go Japanese[-language] school. It was all right.
- MK: And your own house, what did it look like? Try describe it to us. What kind of house was it?
- RT: I know he had a porch and he had concrete steps. Both sides had rock wall going up, both sides. I don't know who kept the yard. Probably my father or my brothers. Then we used to dig around the porch, the dirt, and we used to find these rings, crosses, and whatever. This one is Halloween [spooky] kind, right? I don't know what happened to those things. Funny.
- MK: How many bedrooms did you folks have?
- RT: I really don't remember. All we knew is that we slept, go in the house, left-hand corner. We used to sleep on the floor. Poor people, right?
- WN: You had three of you, right? Three boys.
- RT: Yeah.

WN: You were the youngest.

RT: Plus my sister's kid, the niece. I remember in the night, when I was sleeping, then my mother guys talk loud and everything. I get up and listen to them. They said that—Kazu was born, right? The girl was born. As the days went on, she had fever. When the fever burned her mind up, the medicine didn't do any good. Eventually, as she grew older, we found that she wasn't normal like us but more like on the borderline. . . . What's that?

BT: Retarded.

RT: Yeah, retarded or just above.

BT: Just like mentally retarded but educable.

RT: Just above. But she was going school, Lunalilo School, and everything. But she wasn't as smart like everybody else because of that. But eventually she went on to. . . . She finished Lunalilo School and I remember that was the end of it. She couldn't make it to intermediate.

WN: But tell us what growing up in the McCully area was like. What did you do to have good fun as a kid?

RT: We used to go to Lunalilo School and there were—what do you call that?—*hau* bushes? Tall ones, we used to swing around. Used to play swings, play tags, and whatever. Play marbles. We never knew anything about fishing until we came back from the Mainland and we lived two blocks down Diamond Head side. Then growing up in high school, eventually we went fishing in the Ala Wai.

Ala Wai Canal was good to me because I learned how to swim over there. Right by, they used to call that Kau-Kau Korner, yeah? Remember that? Kau-Kau Korner? There's the Makiki Stream over there. Learned how to dog swim, then eventually my brothers would tell me you got to go do this, do that. So I said okay and I learned how to swim over there.

To me I think, it wasn't a wholesome childhood days. I cannot expect much because when you look back, we didn't have the kind of wealth. Everything is, you got to make your own toys. Your own kind. Today, the kids don't know what it means, but when I meet up with one of my friends—he's four years younger than me but we talk about old days. He said, "What happened to the kind of games that we used to play? We don't know." Everything now, manufactured. Longs Drugs, Woolworth, Wigwam.

WN: Did you play *peewee*?

RT: What's that?

WN: The one with the stick and you hit them and whack them.

RT: Oh yeah. That's from the broomstick. Is that what it was called?

WN: *Peewee*. Yeah.

RT: Oh, I didn't know what it was called. (MK laughs.)

WN: That's the second—we just talked to somebody who played the game but didn't know the name of it.

RT: We used to make our own. We used to play across the street from my house, the Ueharas. They had a long driveway to the garage. It was all dirt. So, eventually we got a hold of my dad's pocketknife. We used to draw a line on the dirt. Mark it. Really stick kind.

- WN: I think you call that mumblety-peg.
- RT: Oh, I don't know. Plus we used to get broomstick, we used to cut them in angles and all that. We used to whack them and we used to count. I forget what it was.
- WN: *Peewee*, yeah.
- MK: Yeah, that's *peewee*.
- WN: So you had a longer broomstick—right?—that you held in your hand. You had a shorter broomstick, shorter stick with a bias cut.
- RT: And whack them.
- WN: And whack them. So did you hang out with your brothers more or did you have your own set of friends?
- RT: No, my brothers. In fact, there was a family—I think the house is still there. I haven't gone there, but I thought the house is still there on Fern and McCully. On the 'Ewa *mauka* side. There's a two-story house. We used to go underneath there on the basement side. We would always learn how to play Monopoly. Monopoly, yeah. It was so fun. Yeah, I swear we start to crank up our brains right. (WN and MK chuckle.)
- WN: Monopoly yeah? That's a good game to learn about different things. (Laughs)
- MK: You learn to count money.
- RT: Yeah. Right. Math. Addition. How to make money with the hotels and everything. I don't know what happened to those guys, and across the street another Chinese guy, family. He used to work for the Board of Water Supply. He used to be nice to us. He would always give us candy or fruits or whatever. I always thought, "Man, this guy must have a lot of money." They can afford to give kids candy and fruits.
- WN: Were there any times when the whole community would get together for anything? Or you folks would go?
- RT: Oh, the only thing we used to go is next to Sheridan Building Supply when they had I don't know what kind of event, they used to throw the small *mame*, the beans.
- WN: The beans?
- RT: Yeah, I don't know what. . . .
- MK: *Setsubun*?
- WN: *Setsubun*.
- MK: They would throw the small beans and say, "Out with the bad luck, in with the good."
- RT: We used to scramble for that, because the thing was tasty. Taste good.
- MK: And the more of the beans you catch and you eat, the more good luck you're supposed to get.
- RT: I remember that we used to get the pole with lot of white papers you used to shake around. I don't know what.
- WN: In Shinto that's. . . .



- RT: I don't know what it is but even Sheridan and even at Pearl City one, we used to love go there, because when they throw the beans man it was tasty right? (MK laughs.) You never did that?
- BT: You'd pick it up on the ground?
- RT: Yeah. We never think about anything dirty or what. We don't eat the dirt or rocks.
- BT: Was it like dried beans or like boiled? Soybeans?
- RT: Yeah. Round. The green ones.
- MK: I know the temple that we're members of, they do that. But we've never gone to that.
- RT: Really?
- MK: The *Setsubun*. Now I know we should go because it taste good.
- WN: Taste good.
- RT: Yeah. (MK laughs.)
- WN: And you pick them off the ground?
- RT: Yeah, we pick them off the ground. (WN laughs.) They'd throw them yeah? You would catch whatever you can and it would hit the ground. Just like Christmas time when the Santa Claus come with the candy they throw, right? They'd fall on the ground and you'd just pick them all up. You sort out the candies that you wanted, all the rest throw them away.
- WN: This one was beans.
- RT: Yeah, this was beans. Soybeans. I don't know what you call them. Green beans. Every so often I see them at Don Quijote's in a package.
- MK: You were saying that you thought that Chinese family must be kind of rich, because they would give you folks candy. What did you think of your family? Poor? Real poor? Doing okay?
- RT: Poor.
- MK: Poor.
- RT: Poor because only my dad worked. I don't know what the wages were but all I knew—even growing up in high school—when I wanted new pants I cannot get new pants. New shirt, I cannot get new shirt. Underpants. Always got to get hand-me-downs. (WN laughs.) Hand-me-down. The girls used to say, “Your brother used to wear that shirt.” *Hazukashii*, but cannot help it. Never think about that kind of stuff.
- WN: Just you're the youngest of three boys so, of course you're going to get the hand-me-downs. Third generation, yours. The oldest brother.
- Okay. So were there like fruit trees around there? You got like mangoes? Lychee? Anything like that when you guys were kids?
- RT: No. The only thing we knew was mangoes. Mangoes. My neighbors' mangoes. Japanese[-language] school, they used to get mangoes. We used to throw rocks and everything to drop the thing. We used to get sticks. Bring them down and we used to eat.

- My enjoyment I had was that when we came back from the war—I mean from the Mainland we used to go to the Ala Wai with the flashlight and find crabs. Samoan crabs, 7-11 crabs. We used to make spear. The kind of spear we used to make was—you know the sixteen-penny nail?
- WN: Sixteen what?
- RT: Sixteen-penny nail.
- WN: Oh, okay.
- RT: Sixteen-penny nail, we used to sharpen them up. We used to wrap them around with the wires and everything to a broomstick, and we used to go with the flashlight. We walk down the Ala Wai and stab the Samoan crabs, 7-11 crabs. When they were digging for clams by 'Iolani School, Ala Wai [Elementary] School, we used to go dig for clams up there. My other friend Rodrigues said, "No one living over there. At the end of the Ala Wai by the library they get clams too."
- I said, "Yeah, why you guys never bring them over?" I met the guy Rodrigues in Wai'anae doing real estate. Go drink and everything. Talk story. It was all right.
- MK: You mentioned Japanese[-language] school. Where did you go Japanese school?
- RT: The Japanese[-language] school over there? The McCully Japanese School. I remember the *kōchō-sensei* was Miho. I remember after English school [public school hours]—by the way that Japanese school, they used to get barracks over there. That's where I went for kindergarten. Then we graduated and we went to Lunalilo School ground. First grade, second grade, third. But, after school we would line up over there in Japanese school out in the courtyard, and I think Japan they still have everybody line up. We used to do exercise first. Everybody used to march into the school and we used to *benkyō*.
- MK: You used to study.
- WN: This was after English school.
- RT: Yeah. But, too bad the war started, because that was the end of my learning of the Japanese language. I went to only *san nensei*. Only third grade. It was kind of difficult for me to write letters to my father when I was in the military. So I used to go—I went to Hakubundo. Iida's, Beretania and Maunakea Street.
- WN: Nu'uanu?
- RT: Nu'uanu. Iida's. I bought the—what do you call that?
- BT: Dictionary?
- RT: No, there's a chart.
- BT: *A-I-U-E-O*?
- RT: Yeah. All that.
- BT: *Hiragana* chart?
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: Yeah, *hiragana*.

- RT: *Katakana* too. I used to write and learn from that. My brother Herbert—oldest brother—he was four years older than me. When he went to Korea, my father used to write letter to him. He just write them out—my brother.
- MK: He could write in Japanese?
- RT: Yeah.
- MK: So up to third grade, what kind of things did you learn in Japanese[-language] school?
- RT: Not much but a slap on the head if you out of line right? (MK and WN laugh.)
- WN: So you went Lunalilo School and then afterwards you went McCully Japanese *Nihongo gakkō*.
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: Which one did you like better?
- RT: Both schools, I enjoyed it. Because, curiosity right? You got to learn right? When you're young still you like to learn learn learn, because your classmates and everything is learning too right. Because you cannot *hantai* anything. It's a learning process.
- MK: So you cannot rebel. You cannot go against that much.
- RT: Yeah.
- MK: What do you remember most about Lunalilo School?
- RT: It was two stories. The administration building where the bomb hit [on December 7, 1941] and the fire and everything came on one level. We used to run around over there and plus that my mother used to go to the store—Showā-Do store—and everything. Buy us shave ice. *Crack seed* and everything. Ice cream, like that.
- See, ice cream then wasn't like ice cream today. We used to love the Popsicle like that. The end of the Popsicle, the stick would say we're entitled to another Popsicle. Even the cone right? The bottom of the cone you see a slip of paper, entitled to another one. Milk Nickel. All these. We kind of missed that. Before, even for five cents, we used to get packages of *see mui*. After we eat that we used to chew on paper bag. You went through that.
- WN: The brown paper bag.
- RT: Yeah. Until we can suck as much as we can out of there.
- WN: So, you talk about stores. What stores were in that area?
- RT: Showā-Do.
- WN: Showā-Do.
- RT: By Pumehana and Citron [Streets]. We used to go to Okahara. They don't make that kind of straw-looking—I forget, what do you call *da kine*? You don't see it. It's just like puffed rice. Only thing, straw-type.
- WN: But it was shaped like a straw.
- RT: Sugar. Huh?
- WN: It was shaped like a straw but with puffed rice.

- RT: Yeah. Different color puffed rice and everything we used to like. We used to like go shave ice, ice cream, *crack seed*. Then we used to walk back and I always found money next to the telephone post. I don't know who puts it there, but I used to find nickels, quarters, dimes.
- WN: The same post?
- RT: No, different posts.
- WN: Oh, I see.
- RT: I used to like to go where my dad goes. I think it was Algaroba Street. They used to have a chicken coop over there. My father used to go buy eggs over there. When he would look in a pigeon coop kind of chicken coop he used to grab the egg. Eat the raw egg right there. (MK and WN laugh.) But then, every time I look around in the bushes, I used to find paper money. One dollar, five dollar, ten bucks like that. I guess it's grown in me that wherever I walk, I always look on the ground to see if there's any.
- WN: You were talking about stores, but do you remember people coming to your house to sell things—people coming in the neighborhood with trucks selling vegetables or fish or anything like that?
- RT: Yeah, on Fern Street, after the war there was like a station wagon with. . . . It's an old truck with the side panels, used to prop them up. Get all the vegetables, fruits, and everything. Before the war---after the war they used to get the *manapua* man. He got a long stick, throw them on the shoulder with a five-gallon can on each side. He used to yell out. Have never eaten *manapua* so I don't know what the hell that is made of, but they used to come around. They used to have a Model A, you know what's a Model A?
- WN: Ford.
- RT: With the—what do you call that?—the backseat. . . .
- WN: Rumble seat.
- RT: Rumble seat. Stainless steel container. He used to sell tofu. Cold you know. My mother used to buy tofu from the guy. He used to come around. That's the only three people that I know. That vendors used to come. But now, I understand there's a van. The post office—an old used one, the guy got a compressor in the back, generator. He was selling ice cream. Just like when we're living in Hālawā right? We used to buy.
- MK: So, you had a few vendors that would come. Peddlers that used to come. You bought the tofu.
- RT: Selling vegetables and. . . .
- BT: But that's after the war?
- RT: Yeah. After the war.
- MK: After the war. Before the war, you folks would just go to the stores?
- RT: Yeah, to the store.
- WN: So your mother would buy things like rice, or the big items. How would she go and carry it back?
- RT: My father used to buy the rice. He used to buy them by the hundred-pound bag. I couldn't lift them up. Too heavy.

- WN: Growing up, what did you have to do for chores as a kid?
- RT: Cut grass.
- WN: Cut grass?
- RT: As we grew older, we had to go follow my father. From eighth grade—after we came back from the camp—I was a chosen one to follow my father doing custodial work for National Mortgage [and Finance Co., Ltd.]. Emptying the trash can, sweeping up, mopping up, cleaning the toilets, filling up the soda water containers. The vendors' kind. Fill up.
- WN: But as a kid, you didn't have to do anything around the house?
- RT: I don't recall doing anything, except for after the war we were moved to the other side. Me and my brother George used to help out doing the laundry, because the jeans was too heavy for my mother. We used to get the old, Easy washing machine. There was another unit—there was two rollers. Squeeze the thing in. She wring the thing.
- MK: Wring it.
- RT: It wasn't enough, so my mother used to scold us every time. "Don't use that for the jeans!" The jeans was thick yeah, so me and my brother used to turn other way and turn this way. Hang them up on the drying line. On the line right? It was all right. Only thing I did not say was that I didn't have any new clothes except for hand-me-down kind of clothes.
- WN: So, get to war yeah?
- MK: Mm-hmm [yes].
- WN: So, you were nine years old around that time on December 7th. What was that day like? You remember?
- RT: Yeah, we was outside. It was a Sunday. We was outside. We were playing. This was seven o'clock. I don't know how they got to eight o'clock, but seven o'clock we saw the airplanes flying around and everything. Next thing you know everybody yelling, "There's a fire at the Miyamoto store!" Miyamoto drug store by McCully and King Street. It was burning. They were saying the school was burning too. They leveled the library.
- WN: Lunalilo School?
- RT: Yeah. Lunalilo School. We ran over there. We didn't know what the hell was what. All we knew was a fire. But the next thing we know that it's the war. War. What the hell is war? Anyway, next thing we knew we had to carry around—we were issued gas masks and I recall that we had to put it on, tie it. We used to go in one room, come out, and go into another room. If your gas mask leaked, they would have to tighten up everything. We used to carry around the gas mask container with the strap around. We used to walk all around the place with them. It was fun, but. . . (WN and MK chuckle.)
- WN: You know where the Lunalilo School was hit and the store was hit, it was right there at McCully Street. Around that area. Did you hear anything? You hear any explosion or anything like that?
- RT: No, all we knew is that there were airplanes flying around. All we knew, "Hey there's a fire going on!" We would run over there. Next thing we knew, another place on fire. Next thing we go home they say Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor.
- MK: How did you feel about that? Hearing that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor?
- RT: As a youngster, who cares. We don't know what's what. You know.

MK: How did your parents react? What do you remember?

RT: Well, my mother was telling my father that Japan invaded over here. Going to get war. Next thing you know, as the months, days go by, all I knew was—I forget what day it was. I was home in the living room when the FBI agent came—tall *haole* guy. I had to go look up and everything. We were small then. Next thing we knew that he was hauling my mother away. We were left there all by ourselves.

Then, when my dad came home, we told him what had happened. We started to cook and everything. Next thing—I don't know what he did next day—he probably went to immigration site. Find out what's going on.

WN: So when the FBI agents came to your house to pick up your mother, was that December 7th or was it later on?

RT: The following days. Not the exact same day. I'm trying to recall. This was way after December 7, '41. As the weeks went by, all we knew was that in 1942, January my father came home, he said, "We got to get ready to move on to ship us to the Mainland." So he was prepared to sell the house. But he sold the house away to the Taniguchi Store. The Beretania guy's store. He told us was three thousand dollars. At that time, we were youngsters so we don't know the value of money. Anyway, he started to make *toranku*—you know the wooden trunk. He bought lumbars and everything and made. When we were shipped out, I recall the guys coming over and picking up the boxes and shipping them out.

WN: If you know or remember why you think your mother was taken after December 7th, as a nine-year-old boy, what do you think the reasons were?

RT: Well, I don't know who squealed. Some of the neighbors knew that we had a shortwave radio. So, her main reason—I know she always listen to the Japanese music, the news, and everything. But there were no two-way conversation, it's only one-way. Somehow the neighbors they squealed I guess we had a shortwave radio. Next thing we knew, the agents came and they were arguing away in the damn living room. I was listening but I don't know what the hell they're talking about. Next thing I know, hauling my mother away.

MK: You were saying that the FBI guy came in and they're arguing away. What was your mother saying?

RT: I don't know. I don't know what she was saying.

MK: She was just talking back to them?

RT: In other words, I think that the *haoles*, they think it was sass talking to him. Actually when you think about it, as we're getting older, he wasn't justifiable to haul her ass in. There was no concrete evidence that we were in cahoots with Japan, because the radio was only listening device. It's not a microphone or what, conversing back and forth.

WN: You said that you folks once in a while would go to Buddhist church on Sheridan Street.

RT: Yeah.

WN: Do you remember if your mother was active in it? Did she go there a lot? She active in any kind of group thing?

RT: She couldn't because we were youngsters. Cannot leave us alone by ourselves. But, that's life.

MK: Then, when you said the FBI came, was it one person? Two?

RT: It was two.

- MK: Two of them?
- RT: One stood by. I remember the guy. Stood by the door—front door. I think back to myself, I say, “Yeah, that’s too bad because they don’t want my mother running out.”
- WN: You said your mother—you think your mother may have talked back or something.
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: Was that understandable? Was she of that kind of personality?
- RT: Yeah. She always a sassy *buggah*.
- WN: (Laughs) Like who was she sassy to before as you were growing up?
- RT: Well, according to my father, the Nu‘uanu property, because she always had problem with the tenants, my father said, “Enough is enough.” Just sell the place and move on.
- WN: Yeah, you mentioned that earlier that your mother would talk to the tenants.
- RT: Yeah. Giving her bad time and everything. My father was saying, “Enough is enough already.” Move on to single home. To hell with the rentals. But that was his income, too. But my mother no understand them. But before, the housewives was housewives. They never were out there being employed unless they’re single. But once they get married, they stayed at home.
- WN: Can I ask, your grandfather, Rev. Fujitani, did he come to Honolulu at all? Did he visit you folks or anything like that?
- RT: I don’t even know how he looks like.
- WN: Okay, so you don’t remember him coming at all?
- RT: I don’t even remember if there was a funeral service or what, anything. Because my mother never mentioned anything. Even her mother, she never mentioned anything. Did she ever mention anything? Nothing, right?
- BT: All I knew was that her father was a *bon-san*.
- RT: Yeah. And that’s it. Even the funeral service or illness or anything. All she talked about was her brother. Her brother and the sister. Teru-*chan* in LA and over here, Fujitanis and the Sasaki.
- WN: Do you remember like having people coming over to your house from the church or from the stores or anything like that?
- MK: Or because your dad worked on trunks and things . . .
- WN: I’ll be right back.
- MK: . . . did people come to the house—business people, clients, or anything?
- RT: I don’t remember.
- MK: Nothing like that. Let’s wait until he comes back.
- (Taping stops, then resumes.)

This is a real unusual situation, you know, for a mother to be taken in . . .

- RT: Incarcerate—taken in. Because she's a nisei, see. But my mother used to be very vocal. She think she was always right.
- WN: You said your mother was at Fort Armstrong? Was she held at immigration station?
- RT: Well, I thought we were at there, because we used to go to Fort Armstrong and visit her.
- WN: Okay.
- RT: I don't recall going to Sand Island or Honouliuli or any other place.
- WN: Fort Armstrong.
- RT: Fort Armstrong.
- WN: And what do you remember about what the place looked like?
- RT: I know looks like an office. Look like one office.
- WN: An office. Looked like an office?
- RT: But that's about it. Because my father used to talk to her and then that's it. After that, we used to just take off.
- BT: So you guys never saw her? Did you guys see her?
- RT: I don't recall seeing her.
- BT: Just like you guys would be in a waiting room and then he would go in?
- RT: Yeah, sort of, yeah. Because I've never seen her over there. All I know, we went there, we parked the car, you know. We got out, we just followed.
- MK: How long was your mother away at this place?
- RT: Couple months or few months because in February we had to load up and go already. See, in December 7, '41. February '42, we moved out of the house and we got shipped out. So it wasn't that long at all.
- MK: You're pretty certain it was '42, not '43 or anything? It was '42?
- RT: Wait now, '42? You're right. It wasn't '42. We reached in '43 because we stayed year and a half in Jerome [Relocation Center], yeah? And year and a half in Gila [River Relocation Center]. So it's '43 to '44 and '44 to '45. And 1943, we go. Almost a year she was incarcerated, I would think.
- MK: Wow.
- RT: Yeah, you're right. I know it was in February we were moved out and we went to the Mainland. It wasn't '42, my mistake.
- MK: And you were saying your father told you folks, "Oh, we got to get ready to move." In January he told you that. February, you shipped out.
- RT: He was making his *toranku* and everything. The guy was smart, but. Made a lot of good things, man.
- BT: So who was cooking? How did you guys eat in the meantime?



- RT: Well, I guess *Jiji* used to cook his own. Used to cook for us.
- WN: Your father?
- RT: Yeah.
- BT: So when did they take Grandma away?
- RT: Remember now, Auntie Florence wasn't living with us. She was out.
- BT: When did the FBI agents come? Was it in '41 or late '42?
- RT: No, this was '41.
- BT: Forty-one. Right after the war started?
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: So you think your mother might have been at Fort Armstrong for about a year.
- RT: Yeah, I would think so, around there. Because I remember moving out in February. Then we got shipped out. Forty-three, yeah. Because year and a half, '44 and '45. Another year and a half.
- WN: What do you remember about the trip, the journey? You went on a boat from. . .
- RT: Yeah, from here to Oakland, California. Then we got on a train. We went through, I remember, because it was February it's snowing. Like I was saying before, in Salt Lake City we stopped. So my father was telling us, "Look. *Yuki ga shiro*." You know, on the mountain, all the snow. We looked out the train, it was snow out there. Grab one cup and we told the guard over there, *haole* guy, "Can we have some snow?" He scooped up. Just like shave ice. (WN chuckles.) Nice, fine, you know.
- BT: Wasn't yellow?
- RT: No. It was right out—and we watched him scooping up that thing, giving us. Was good but. (MK chuckles.)
- WN: So you ate 'em without anything? No syrup, nothing? (Chuckles)
- RT: No, just like that was good.
- MK: Moving back a little bit, when your dad told you and your brothers, "We have to pack up. We have to prepare. We're going to leave Hawai'i," what did you think?
- RT: Cannot think anything. We just got to do what he tell us. Fine. You cannot sass talk back because we don't know what's happening. You got to figure I was young then, right? Eight, nine years old. So how can you back talk to your father? Not like today's kids, right? Give you bad time, right?
- MK: Then when you folks were going to leave Hawai'i, what did you tell friends or relatives?
- RT: We don't say anything. Just packed up and we just went.
- MK: When did you finally get to see your mother?
- RT: On the boat.
- MK: On the boat?

RT: Yeah. On the boat. I remember that because on the way up there, I got sick, too. I got seasick. But it was a good adventure for me.

WN: Do you remember your mother being. . . . Was there any changes to your mother?

RT: Attitude.

WN: Was she any different?

RT: No. Person like that will never change.

MK: So physically, no change? Seemed the same.

RT: The attitude was still the same. Even when we came back, she was still a wise ass.

(Laughter)

RT: Yeah?

BT: Yes.

RT: Yeah, my daughter will vouch for that.

WN: I'm trying to picture a wise-ass nisei woman. (Chuckles) Cannot.

BT: She's a little on the heavier side, yeah?

RT: Yeah.

BT: By the time I was born, she was on the heavy side.

RT: She was always the same.

WN: You know, you're the first person that we're talking to whose mother was the one incarcerated.

RT: Incarcerated, yeah? Not the father.

WN: Everyone else was the father. That's why we're asking so many questions about your mother.

RT: My father was working. He's a—what do you call that?—he's a speechless person. He don't say anything, unless you ask him.

WN: Pretty much the opposite of your mother.

RT: Yeah. That's why, according to my father, when we were living up Nu'uaniu, he owned six cottages, he telling us, that he was renting it out. He said, "Can you imagine all the money I was making? Here your mother gives sass talk to the tenants. Get trouble. I'm working, I'm worried about what's going to happen." So he said, "I was forced to sell the place and move on." Otherwise, today, we'd be rich, you know. (WN chuckles.)

But cannot help. What we have, we work hard for it.

MK: You were mentioning on the ship, you were seasick.

RT: Yeah.

MK: What else you remember about that time?

RT: The ocean.

BT: How big was the ship?

RT: Just a regular transport.

WN: Wasn't the *Lurline*? Some those that ended up in Jerome went on the *Lurline* because it was taken over by the military during the war. You don't recall that?

RT: I don't recall that, *Lurline*. I remember it was a small ship and rocking all round and everything. I think *Lurline* would have been smooth ship, yeah?

BT: So how many people was on the ship?

RT: I don't know how many.

MK: Then your family, you folks stayed together on the ship or you folks separated?

RT: No, we were all together.

MK: All together, your mom, dad. . . .

WN: So who would this be? Your mom, your dad, Herbert, George, yourself, and your half-sister?

MK: Daughter of . . .

WN: Daughter of half-sister.

BT: Yeah, his niece.

MK: And your niece would be. . . . What was her name?

RT: Grace . . .

BT: Kazumi.

RT: . . . Kazumi.

MK: Okay, Grace Kazumi. That's right.

RT: I don't know where she is today.

WN: Okay, let's talk about what you remember about. . . . You were in Block 39 [at Jerome].

RT: Yeah, 39. I think it was 6A, I think.

WN: Barracks 6A.

RT: We were at the end unit.

WN: Can you describe the barracks? What it looked like?

RT: Well, now, see, I have books on what the barracks look like. One-by-twelve with the roofing, felt paper outside with the slats holding them back. It's cold. We had to go get the wood, haul 'em to the house, start the fire, and warm in the house. But during the winter, it was still cool, you know. But Jerome was good. For me, I learned a lot about nature because had forest, the stream, the bayou.

- WN: Tell us about that. What was around there? What did you do to pass the time?
- RT: We used to go in the forest, go look around for turtles, small little turtles, and pick the fruits. Venture around. If can swim, but you see, cannot swim because they said had the water moccasins in the water.
- WN: In the bayou?
- RT: Yeah. So, say, well, forget about it.
- WN: When you say “fruits,” what kind of fruits?
- RT: Strawberry, blackberry, watermelons. That’s somebody else’s farm, but watermelon. I remember when we went there—*pah! pah!* We used to hear the bullet pass, man—*shooo!* Oh, we used to listen to that and we used to run, you know.
- MK: So the watermelons were on a farm outside of the camp?
- RT: Yeah.
- MK: How’d you folks get outside?
- RT: We just walk out. There were no barbed wires. There were no guards. Because we were more, not the hardcore. So I learned a lot because over there we learned how to use carpentry tools. We used to make toys and a lot of stuff. Even Arizona, learning how to make puppets. You know, wooden puppets kind. I don’t know what happened to those. I think my father and my brother threw ’em all away.
- MK: When you say you learned, was it in a classroom?
- RT: Shop.
- MK: Oh, shop. At school?
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: So you don’t remember any kind of fences or gates or anything like that? It was just a barracks and you could go anywhere?
- RT: Anywhere. We used to go in the forest every time. Same thing like Gila, Arizona, we used to walk, walk, walk, walk until we find—what do you call?—extreme kind of irrigation ditch. We used to jump in there because cold water, right? Hot desert. Oh, then we used to walk around, find farmland. Hey, apricots. We used to ask if we can buy apricots. He say, “Yeah.”
- WN: Let me just talk about Jerome first, okay? I don’t want to mix up the two camps, okay? So let’s just talk about Jerome, and you said there was a bayou. What was in the bayou? You said you couldn’t swim because had water moccasin, but what else do you remember around that area?
- RT: Well, had turtles.
- WN: Turtles? How big were the turtles?
- RT: Small kind.
- WN: About what, three inches?
- RT: We used to grab ’em and we used to use ’em as pets.

- BT: Salmonella.
- RT: Besides that, they used to tell us watch out for chiggers. But good thing, I wasn't bitten by a chigger or anything else.
- WN: You mentioned clams last time.
- RT: Yeah. Those were big. We used to try farm clams. You know why? I'm trying to remember that clam event. They had clam shells on the outside on the low tide, kind. This is why we started to dig. We found clams. Besides that, nothing else. It was good, but.
- WN: It was you and your two brothers going around. Did you have a group of other boys?
- RT: Yeah, the neighbors and all that. Yeah.
- WN: Were they from Hawai'i?
- RT: Yeah, they were all from. . . . They were more from Kaka'ako side. They're called the Kaka'ako boys.
- MK: Would you remember their names?
- RT: All I remember is Hasegawa. All passed on.
- WN: So Block 39, you recall mostly Hawai'i boys, Hawai'i kids?
- RT: Yeah, more so. Block 39 and 38. Our friend Donald Matsumura [of Block 40], had 'em on the list, huh? He was living on Block 38, 37, something like that. This is why we became friends like that because we used to go out in the forest like that. Too bad Donald passed away.
- WN: So your barracks had a potbellied stove where you guys fed the firewood inside to keep warm?
- RT: I don't know if potbelly or what, but all I remember is that there was in the barracks they have one building for ladies, girls; next one is the men's.
- WN: This is for what? Bath?
- RT: Yeah. And then had a laundry room. Then beyond that, they used to have piles of wood that we can go there anytime to pick up logs, take home for burn. At the end of the barracks used to get the cafeteria. The cafeteria is just like picnic benches. I recall sitting down on there.
- MK: Would you folks go eat as a family or how did it work?
- RT: Yeah, we all went together.
- MK: Like the kids could go school and have time to play, what were your parents doing?
- RT: Stay home. My father used to go work because he was carpenter. He was earning nineteen dollars a month because he was a foreman. But if he wasn't a foreman, he would be earning sixteen dollars. That's what he told us.
- WN: Your father worked as a carpenter foreman in the camp?
- RT: I don't know where he worked.
- MK: Did he ever go away from the camp, leave the camp?

- RT: He left. He said he was going on a trip with my oldest brother. They went to Chicago. I don't know, one week, two weeks, or what. Then he came back. My brother Herbert said he's glad he went up there.
- MK: Then your mother, what did she do in camp?
- RT: Nothing.
- MK: No work for her?
- RT: I don't know what she did. We never stayed home. We just kept on going off.
- MK: What was school like in camp?
- RT: Same thing like American school because we had *haole* teachers. As far as I'm concerned, I learned a lot—history, geography. Too bad they never teach music. But we used to sing. Had to learn a lot of math. That's about it.
- WN: That's when you met other kids, right, at the school?
- RT: Yeah, but I cannot remember all the names except for Donald. Because Donald was a year older than I was, but we got along. You know, we clicked. Plus that, I met him in the service. When we went to New York City, we used to go to this Horseshoe Bar on this 50th Street. Drink, bowling, drink.
- WN: Do you remember Mainland kids at the school?
- RT: I don't remember.
- MK: All the activities you mentioned like you folks would catch turtles, you'd hear about the water moccasins being there, going to the forest, was that all kind of like on your own or organized?
- RT: On our own.
- MK: On your own?
- RT: Yeah, because it was freewheeling because there was no fence.
- WN: Do you remember guards around?
- RT: I don't remember any guards. All I knew is that we were free to go any kind place, but in order to leave camp like my father guys when they went to Chicago, they got to go—I don't know where they went, but some office to get pass to leave the camp. Then they came back.
- MK: What was the purpose of going to Chicago?
- RT: To look at the place, I guess.
- WN: (Chuckles) No relative or anything over there? No?
- RT: Not like Grandma. Grandma, my mother, used to—we're talking about Arizona then but. . . .
- WN: Let's move to—we're pretty much done with Jerome? You have any questions about Jerome? How was the food?
- BT: Like who cooked?

RT: Regular cafeteria stuff. Hell, we were lined up with the trays, and they just pour the food on, and we go back to our picnic table like and we just eat. The utensils, think about it now, it's just like military trays, you know, the stainless-steel trays.

WN: Compartments?

RT: Yeah, compartments. Even the milk. It was all right. Stainless-steel fork, knife, spoon.

MK: What kind of food did you folks get?

RT: I don't remember. We just ate. Yeah, was all right.

BT: You guys have rice or potatoes?

RT: Anything.

BT: Spaghetti?

(Laughter)

WN: Probably all of the above. (Laughs)

RT: I don't recall that kind stuff.

WN: Was it new to you? You know, you grew up eating like Japanese foods?

RT: No, actually, my grandmother, his mom, she used to work in a—she called—*haole* house. She worked as a helper, a cook, so she learned how to cook *haole* style, like pan-fried chicken, chicken with gravy.

WN: Oh, so you folks used to that kind of food, yeah, *haole* food.

MK: You were used to . . . Maybe not that much of a change, yeah? Then, you know, you went wintertime—snow, cold. How'd you guys manage with the cold and different kind of climates?

RT: We all had coats, jackets, and whatever. In fact, I recall long johns. And every day, we got to change. My mother is saying we got to change. Just like underpants already. Cold like hell.

(Laughter)

BT: So you guys had BVDs, and long johns, and another pants?

RT: Yeah. She say, "Stink, you know." My mother tell, "Stink."

WN: And in the cold weather, you guys took bath every day?

RT: Yeah. We had hot shower. Just like military, all that, shower heads. Even the toilets, all lined up.

WN: Was it a long walk from the barracks to the shower and the toilet?

RT: Just about a half a block. But it was cold. It was a good experience.

WN: Were there any kind of organized things like dances, parties, sports, anything like that?

RT: My oldest brother was on a football team. His picture is in that Jerome annual.

WN: So he played football on a team?

RT: Yeah.

WN: Was it a school team or just a . . .

RT: A school team.

WN: So you went, midway through, you guys moved over to Gila. Gila Bend, you call it.

RT: Arizona.

WN: Yeah. What was that like? How do you compare Arizona with Arkansas?

RT: Different environment, yeah? Over there was almost like a desert like. No more trees like [Arkansas] where you get forest and everything. But one thing I enjoyed over there is that we used to get to buy the apricots and everything, and come back on the weekends. We used to get movies. You know, outside theater is like a slope and a screen. I learned how to make—what do you call?—like some chairs where we can just sit down sloping back and enjoy the movies. I used to make those. But I don't know what happened to those.

WN: Make 'em out of what? Wood?

RT: Wood. My father used to bring home wood from work and we used to make. I took carpenter shop, too, over there. How to make like Donald Duck, that Disney World kind. You know, the kind picture you find in the magazine, comic book, like that. We used to tear 'em up, and we used to draw 'em on the board. We used to cut 'em out, all the band saw, everything. The teacher used to say that should get pins, you know, safety pin, make a groove underneath there, you can glue that safety pin in there, and you can make. . . .

WN: Pin 'em to your shirt.

RT: Yeah. You know, right? You coloring and everything, like that. But I don't know what happened to those.

WN: Was this for school? School project?

RT: Yeah. After we finished, we were graded, and then plus that, we used to take 'em home. I used to get that Pinocchio, especially. I made a darn Pinocchio. All the face, the neck, the arms, everything was in joints.

MK: You made a puppet?

RT: Yeah. There's a dowel where you stick 'em in the back and you just hop around, and the legs. . . .

MK and WN: Wow.

RT: But I don't know what happened to it.

MK: Wow. Having a father who was a carpenter, did he help or advise you as you were working on things like that?

RT: No, this a school class project.

MK: It's strictly a school project?

RT: This is why when we came back, I was in the eighth school enrolled at Washington Intermediate. I got to get that wood shop. I took the wood shop and mechanical drawing, like that. You know, because of that, I was employed by the state.



- MK: So your learning shop activities at Jerome and Gila, helpful?
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: So you used to go to outdoor theater and make chairs out of wood so you can sit down and watch the movies.
- RT: Yeah, I don't know what happened to those chairs. I think my father threw 'em all away for packing, yeah, coming back. There was only so much room, right?
- BT: How high was the chair?
- RT: It's like the sand chair.
- BT: So it's a kind of small, short-legged . . .
- RT: Yeah. You can stretch out your leg, sand chair like. But it wasn't made of aluminum and all that. You make your own kind.
- WN: You said there was a culvert you used to go swimming in?
- RT: Yeah. What do you call that?
- BT: Irrigation ditch.
- RT: Yeah, irrigation ditch. We used to jump in. Good fun. By the time we go walking home, when the farmland, they get trees, and we used to see apricot, we used to go knocking on the doors. For nickel, maybe about two, three of them, you know. So that was good enough for us to eat, eh? We used to take coins with us. So we stop by over there, go ask if we can have. But it's a seasonal thing, see. So it just happened that we went there and it was season that we were able to find fruits.
- MK: How did these farmers react to you folks? Japanese guys coming up to their door?
- BT: Especially during the war, yeah?
- MK: Yeah.
- RT: No more reaction because all they're looking for is the money. They're willing to sell us the darn thing for money. No questions asked. Where you folks from or what nationality you are. No questions asked. All you go and just pick the apricots yourself, give 'em the money, we just walk away. That was the good part.
- BT: It was fresh picked?
- RT: Yeah. Right off the trees, so you know, right?
- WN: Now, you say Jerome, you don't remember fences or anything at Jerome. What about Gila?
- RT: No fences.
- WN: You don't remember fences either? I wonder if they had, but you thought you were so free that you didn't even notice the fences.
- RT: I never went through any fence. In fact, the only thing I remember is, there was one hill and we used to walk across there and there was just like a garbage dump like and there was a shack. One day, we saw the guy hanging over there, man.
- BT: In the shack?

RT: Hanging from the shack.

BT: Hanging from the shack or inside . . .

RT: Inside, but was underneath the shack.

BT: It was like an open . . .

RT: Yeah.

BT: So was like a patio.

RT: Same thing like in Jerome. You know, you see, Grandma used to tell us, get the two gallons, go down to the place where they make the steam water and everything, and we used to go pick up. We used to look in the. . . Next thing we know, wah! There was a guy hanging in there.

BT: Was a *haole* guy or Japanese guy?

RT: Must be somebody from in there, incarcerated, right? Nobody else. You know, hanging over there, and the flies was coming around, man.

MK: So, you saw that at Jerome, and you saw something like that again at Gila?

RT: Yeah, in Gila, too. They committed suicide, hanging. Hang themselves. But both cases, there were flies all around, maggots, you know. I still remember the Jerome one. The darn thing wiggling over and they just like, you know. . . .

WN: So you actually saw the hanging body?

RT: Yeah.

WN: So you guys found him? You guys were the ones who found him?

RT: Yeah, but we shut the door. (Chuckles) We took off.

MK: Oh!

RT: You know, spooky, right?

BT: But you said it was open? So it was actually . . .

RT: Not in Jerome one.

WN: Jerome one was in a barn, I think, yeah?

RT: Yeah.

BT: But this other one was in a . . .

RT: Arizona was in a four-post roof. Anyway, just like a shack.

MK: No walls and . . .

RT: Yeah.

MK: Oh, boy. As a kid, did you hear anything about any community reaction? People's reaction?

RT: No. Everything is hush, hush. No more *da kine* rumors or community meeting or block meeting or what. Otherwise, my mother and my dad would go there and listen to them and bring back the news. But nothing.

But as a whole, I enjoyed both camps.

MK: And I think you were saying, your dad was kind of ingenious, dealing with the environment, making things.

RT: Yeah.

MK: What did you make?

RT: Like in Arizona, it was hot. Because he has access to lumbers, he made screen. I still remember, he's so smart. He made one box with a screen. Burlap bags surrounded them. Then he get the water hose working over there. He get the fan, so when the fan would go, it'll cool the water and our barracks, our room, would be cool, eh? But with the water dripping in the *tarai*, right? He would buy the watermelon and put it in there so when you come home, you come up, you would be eating it after dinner. So I thought he was smart, in view of that.

WN: So he actually made his air-conditioning system?

RT: Yeah, with the cooling system for the watermelon, too, (chuckles) because the water is cooled off, right?

WN: So he had two functions.

RT: Yeah.

WN: One to cool off you guys and one to make cold water.

RT: Because nobody had refrigerator, right? But, ey.

WN: Wow, that's ingenious.

RT: He was a smart man.

MK: Then your father that time, he still worked as a carpenter's foreman at Gila?

RT: Yeah.

WN: Oh, so he kept the same job when he moved? Same kind of job?

RT: Yeah, I don't know where they were. I remember he telling me, "The *haoles*, they stupid *buggahs*, you know. Giving us only nineteen dollars a month. We should be earning more." But what can we say? Youngster, right? By that time I was about ten, eleven years old already. We didn't know any better. By the time we came back, I was eleven and my birthday is December, so I'm going into eighth grade, already. Actually, it was good experience. Kind of hardship when you think about it, but you're living in a different environment. One is cold and everything, had a forest, and the other one is like a desert and then hot.

WN: Which one you like better?

RT: Fun type, I would rather live in a forest where it's cooler, right? There was snow and everything, but still then, when you think about it, there's more adventures going into the forest, right? Get fruits and get all kind different animals, right? Chipmunks *da kine*, what do you call *da kine*?

WN and MK: Squirrels.

RT: Squirrels, you know. But Arizona, I learned how to ride the bicycle. Because somebody had bicycle and they brought it up. So I watch the guys how they ride the bicycle. I say, "The main thing is to balance and keep pumping." (WN and MK chuckle.) That's how I showed you guys how to ride, right?

BT: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Are we done with Gila River? Any other questions?

MK: I was wondering, at Gila River, again you have like *kotonks*, Mainland Japanese, and local, yeah? What was it like?

RT: I had no idea that they were Californians or whatever. Because we were youngsters. You got to figure that, right? You fellows in maybe high school or older, yeah. But once you're of age, the boys would be volunteered to go into the army. So even when we were in Arkansas, we used to see soldiers. In the night, used to have dances and like that, right?

MK: Yeah, yeah.

RT: The older girls would go for dancing and everything. For us youngsters, we just go sleep. But we just hear what they talking about. But a lot of Camp Shelby guys used to come over. Now like this guy, George Shiroma, he was a lawyer before World War II started, so when he volunteered to go into 442nd, actually, then he said the lieutenant saved his life because he didn't have to go to the warfront. He was chosen to go to MIS, Military Intelligence Service.

MK: Oh, I see.

RT: He ended up in five years with General Masaharu Honma. And General Honma was an Oxford graduate. He spoke fluent English. He doesn't know why he got to be put away. He's up there. He doesn't know what his subordinates are doing. If any punishment, they should get at the subordinates.

MK: You mean, the Japanese [treatment of the] POWs.

RT: Because it's a war. Because you're the head of it, you should know what's happening.

MK: So for guys your age, you folks would sometimes hear stuff, but otherwise it's more the older kids.

RT: Yeah. See, my oldest brother was just sophomore, junior, four years older than us. So when we came back, he got enrolled in McKinley [High School]. He was playing football and he got hurt so he came out. He didn't play anymore.

MK: Then you talked to us about coming back.

WN: You were talking about the 442 boys. Do you remember the 442 boys coming to Jerome?

RT: I've seen the soldiers, but I don't know their names.

WN: Was it like a big deal when they came or was it just, eh, they just camp and mingled around?

RT: No, they came to visit their family. Like I was telling George, he didn't have any family over there, but he say he came with the boys. But because he was shipped out to Minnesota or Michigan, MIS school, he made friends with the other guys.

- WN: So at war's end, you came back, yeah?
- RT: Yeah. We stayed at the YBA [Young Buddhists' Association].
- WN: You folks lived in the YBA?
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: How come you folks have to live over there?
- RT: No place else. We didn't have a home.
- WN: You folks didn't have the McCully home anymore?
- RT: Sold it, right?
- WN: You sold it. Okay.
- RT: You know what my father told me? Three thousand dollars. So he said, oh, "Ma wants to move in McCully again," so they looked around. They found a home on the same street.
- WN: Wiliwili?
- RT: Two block down, Diamond Head side.
- WN: Wiliwili, yeah? Wiliwili and Fern?
- RT: Yeah, on the *makai*, Diamond head side. That where we had that.
- WN: So the Fort Street YBA, what was it like? You stayed in a gym or barracks or. . . ?
- RT: No, right in the main building. Because I don't remember where we slept, on the floor, or the cot, or what. I remember we taking a shower and everything. We used to walk out the front door, we used to walk in town and go down to Golden Wall Theatre, and the park—play in the park, everything. Then during high school, when I was, "Hey, yeah, how come I never see you walking around over there?" I said, well, that's how it goes. After that, we moved into McCully. But it was some event, yeah?
- MK: What kind of work did your dad do when he came back to support the family?
- RT: Well, he worked with Mr. Kasahara. National Mortgage. And International Savings & Loan with Masayuki Tokioka-*san*. Then he used to do all kind of jobs. Mostly maintenance because they used to have rentals, right? So he used to take care all the renters. Next thing I know, on weekends and after school, I used to walk in town because I like buy candy or comic books. When it come five minutes to four, they used to close the front door halfway. I start picking up all the rubbish cans from the girls and the guys. Empty 'em out. Sweep up the floor. I remember Tokioka-*san* is very frugal, you know. One day he call me, he tell me, you know what? He doesn't want me to sweep up the rubber bands and paper clips out past the sidewalk in the curb on the street. I used to sweep all the rubbish out there. He said, "Go pick 'em all up, put 'em my desk." You know, when you think about it, now, I look back from way back, that's being not frugal or stingy or what, but his office expense. The working girls, the clerks like that, when they drop something, they don't pick 'em up. So he realized that. So he telling me, after I sweep out, "Pick up all the things, put 'em on my desk."
- And my brother George, he get push broom. You know what is a push broom, right? See, he used to go and push and it created dust. He told my father he doesn't want him to come over there in the office, sweep up. He like me come there because I pull. When I pull, I don't create no dust. Because I don't want to smell the dust, right? But when you push, you smell all the dust, too, so I pull.

- WN: How about your mother? How did she do after the war?
- RT: She never do anything. Just stay at home. You know Grandma, right? Just stay at home, listen to the music and the news or the TV, whatever came on.
- WN: I wonder what became of that shortwave radio?
- RT: I have no idea.
- BT: Didn't you say they confiscated that?
- RT: Yeah. But I think I remember they had—you remember the RCA with the dog with the little speaker and . . .
- WN: Gramophone, yeah.
- RT: I wonder what happened to that.
- WN: You guys had one of those? Record player?
- RT: Yeah, and the radio to go with it. I used to save my lunch money for go buy *da kine* song, the song, *Ieraishan*. [Yoshiko] Yamaguchi. I used to play 'em off that.
- WN: Well, we're just about done here. You know, we're asking you about your small-kid days and we're asking about your internment and so forth. You have two daughters, three grandchildren. You got married in 1958. To what extent did you tell your children and grandchildren about these experiences?
- RT: Nothing. Nothing, right?
- BT: Not too much.
- RT: If they ask, yeah, I'll talk about it. I don't like to talk too much about it unless they ask. See, even when I went in the service, I save my lunch money and my bus money just to buy one bicycle. When I went in Johnston Island for one year, I saved all the ten cents. I came back from Johnston Island, was all gone. When I came back from the service, I expected my bicycle there, but nothing. I had a guitar. The guitar neck was broken and they nailed it together. I say, forget it. All my savings, buying things for nothing.
- WN: Any more questions? Bev, any more questions?
- BT: No.
- WN: You sure? Okay, well, thank you very much for your time.
- MK: We finished it today.
- END OF INTERVIEW

# **Unspoken Memories:**

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**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

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